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SUBJECT Senator Leahy/Achille Lauro's Hijacking

MARIA SHRIVER: Well, the so-called hijacking of the hijackers was the subject of overnight briefings for certain members of Congress, including Senator Patrick Leahy, the ranking Democrat on the Intelligence Committee. Senator Leahy's joining us right now in our Washington bureau.

Can you bring us up to date? Exactly what were you told last evening about the hijacking?

SENATOR PATRICK LEAHY: Well, we were kept informed as we went along everything that was happening. I don't think many of us got much sleep last night because of the phone calls. But for once, at least, the calls were all positive.

This is a case where we had a lot of things that if they all work right, we get the result we did. They all worked right. And it's a major triumph for the United States.

SHRIVER: What were you told about what went into this decision, how it was brought about?

SENATOR LEAHY: We knew that when Mr. Mubarak went on the news yesterday morning and said that the hijackers had left Egypt, we knew that wasn't so. And it was a case where we knew they were in Egypt. Intelligence was very, very good. When they left, we knew that and were able to send the planes out to intercept the hijackers' plane -- no small feat, in and of itself -- and locating the plane, and then in requiring it to land in Italy.

It's a case where here we are the most powerful nation in the world and we've been frustrated by hijackers and by

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terrorists because often we didn't know where they were or how to reach them or who to bring our military power to bear on. And this was a case where our intelligence was superb, worked very, very well, and allowed the United States to use the options available to it as a superpower.

SHRIVER: What do you think the reaction of your colleagues will be to the decision by President Reagan and the Pentagon?

SENATOR LEAHY: Well, it should be a positive one, and it shouldn't be any kind of a partisan thing. I think this is a case where I would hope there will not be dissenting voices in the Congress. I hope that we say very clearly that the American people support the President on this, because you want to send a signal to future hijackers or future terrorists that we will find them. We'll look for them, we'll identify them, and we'll go after them and we'll bring them to justice. And that's exactly what's happening in this case.

And that is the only way we are going to put any kind of a dent in terrorism. And I support the President's action very, very strongly.

SHRIVER: Okay. Thank you very much, Senator Leahy, for joining us this morning to bring us up to date on this story.

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